

Internet blessing, danger to children

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"The world has entered your home," said Bill Elwell, FBI Special Agent. The Internet on home computers brings to your children a wealth of information, learning opportunities and fun. But it also opens a vortex to sexual predators, pornography and

exposes your children to other dangers on the information superhighway while you are unaware.

"It happens every day," Mr. Elwell noted. "The world has entered your home (and) children don't realize what's out there."

"Protecting Your Children from the Internet," a presentation by FBI Special Agent Bill Georgi of the Albuquerque

CyberCrime Division, is offered to TEAM KIRTLAND parents Oct. 14, in two sessions at 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. in the Rio Grande Community Center. The sessions are complete programs and not two parts of one program.

Absolutely no children 6-16 years old will be permitted to attend the program.

Children in that age range are barred from the program, explained Mr. Elwell, because the program is designed to "give parents a leg up" on techniques to protect their children and to effectively monitor their use of the Internet.

The FBI agent notes that while crime statistics relating to children and the Internet are lower in New Mexico there have been "some cases prosecuted" with children having had sexual encounters as a result of children being located through Internet use. Nationally, Mr. Elwell stated, about 1 percent, or about 30,000 children of 30 million children, using the Internet are reported to have had sexual encounters through contact made on computers with predators.

Teresa Reinhard, Family Support Center readiness team lead and coordinator of the program here, noted, "Kids many times are more adept at using the computer than the parents. (And) predators will use the anonymity of a computer to bait a trusting child. Moms and dads need to educate themselves on how their kids are using the computer to make sure they are protected from (Internet) predators."

Mrs. Reinhard also added that personal safety is one of the results sited in the Community Capacity Action

Plan, an initiative of the Integrated Delivery System/Community Helping Agencies Team early this year. And this program, she said, "will arm parents with the know-how to protect their children from Internet criminals and predators."

After attending the one-hour presentation, Mr. Elwell said, parents may feel "I can protect my children a little bit better" and that "this was an hour well spent."

The 45-minute presentation is geared for parents who have home computers being used by their children. But parents also can learn how to inquire at their children's schools about what safeguards are in place to protect students using the Internet.

Parents should not expect "a computer nerd from the FBI," Mr. Elwell half-seriously jokes. The program is not technical in nature. The program also is not "a morality speech on pornography or a fix-it for online addiction." It simply equips parents with knowledge to better monitor their children's Internet travels in order to protect them. Mr. Elwell compared the techniques to monitoring children's television viewing habits. The presentation with a talk by the agent, PowerPoint slides and question/answers time is in plain, nontechnical language parents can easily understand and use immediately.

No reservations are needed to attend the presentation. To request a presentation for your community organization, parent-teacher organization, church group or other venue, contact the FBI office at 889-1300.



Photo by Clover Hatcher

Maj. Lisa McColgan and her husband Jay observe the Internet choices of their boys, Zachary, 11, and Luke, 9. Major and Mr. McColgan plan to take advantage of the FBI's presentation on "Protecting Your Children from the Internet, Oct. 14, at 9:30 or 1:30 p.m., in the theater.